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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a comprehensive approach to training for child care practitioners and presents a framework for developing staff training. It considers each of the four elements essential to building training experiences: adult developmental change, growth in professional competence, characteristics of adult learning, and training options. Each component is examined as it relates to early childhood personnel who have in-service staff development needs. This information is then synthesized into a model that considers a match between three development or skill levels of child care practitioners and appropriate training guidelines. The model is presented in tabular form that indicates training consideration for each of the three levels: entry- or maintaining level, mid- or support level, and mature or facilitating level practitioners. A list of 36 references is appended. (YLB)

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Professional Development and Child Care Practitioners: Implications for Training

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Running Head: TRAINING

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to propose a framework for examining factors which impact the professional development of individuals working with children. Aspects of personal adult professional development, adult learning characteristics, and guidelines for training are considered. A model of matching professional developmental level of child care practitioners and training options is presented.

Professional Development and Child Care Practitioners: Implications for Training

Professional development of child care practitioners is a critical element in the delivery of quality care to young children. For the majority of administrators, consultants, education coordinators and other personnel responsible for staffing, professional development and training for improved teaching of children is a significant concern. The development of a comprehensive approach to staff development should consider not only selection of topics for training but tailoring training to support the varying characteristics and needs of early childhood personnel as they grow in their professional commitments.

The professional development of child care practitioners has been the focus of a variety of training and research endeavors during the past several years. A number of studies have focused on variables affecting the success or impact of training on changing practitioner performance, noting the need for professional growth, updating, and skill development for improved work with children. While the number and variety of training opportunities and options have increased dramatically, a careful analysis of the factors which may best support successful training for child care practitioners has been slow to evolve. Based on information from teacher educators, life span development theorists, and adult learning strategies, this paper will examine a comprehensive approach to training for child care practitioners

and present a framework for developing staff training. The focus of this framework is the matching of four elements essential to building training experiences: adult developmental change, growth in professional competence, characteristics of adult learning, and training options. Each of these components will be examined as they relate to early childhood personnel who have in-service staff development needs. Given the fluid and sometimes irregular pattern of career growth and work competence in child care, the development of a unique approach to training for professional development is necessary. The factors listed previously (e.g., knowledge of normative adult developmental change, stages of professional growth, characteristics of adult learning, and training criteria) may be combined to form a flexible and comprehensive approach.

Adult Developmental Perspectives

Professional development is generally viewed as parallel to normative qualitative behavior change which occurs over time (Baltes & Goulet, 1970). Such normative change may be viewed in a variety of ways, all of which consider professional development as evolving toward integration of ideas and refinement of skills.

Child care practitioners (teachers, providers, advocates, residential workers) evolve in their professional skills during their careers. This evolution is linked closely to the stages of adult developmental change. There exists within the adult developmental literature two perspectives: a) age theorists who

consider age-related, chronological sections of the life span, and b) stage theorists who consider processes (social interactions, psychological perspectives, role change, and behavioral adjustments) related to age. Each of these groups consider qualitative adjustment and change in adult life which may be reflected in professional growth. While normative growth and adaptation support professional growth, crisis, burnout and adjustments in career and work however, may account for conditions requiring accommodation and may alter the course of normative change.

As noted previously, a multitude of developmental perspectives exist, all of which propose a variety of approaches explaining the phenomenon of change in adulthood. For example, age-linked (chronological) changes are described as stages to be passed through (Gould, 1972, 1978; Kimmel, 1980; Krupp, 1981; Sheehy, 1976). While each of the above theorists propose a different set and description of stage attainment and passage, they consider development in a quantitative view. Resolution or passing through various stages results in (produces) an increase in ability to cope with the conditions of growth and adaptation in adulthood. The primary contribution of these perspectives or theories is the recognition of variability in the rate at which individuals attain and move on to successive stages. This perspective provides guidelines for a) understanding behaviors and issues based on knowledge of stage characteristics, and b)

recognizing approaches for dealing with individuals who, while chronologically similar in age, may vary widely in their developmental sophistication.

The perspective of qualitative change is held by a variety of theorists who maintain that as individuals age there is a definite change in thinking and understanding. Although their theories and models are highly varied, primary proponents of this view include Erikson (1959, 1963), Harvey, Hunt, and Schroeder (1961); Hunt (1971); Kohlberg (1973); Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978); Loevinger (1966); and Piaget (1963). Somewhat more difficult to interpret and apply, the fixed stage or cognitive developmental perspective assumes cognitive function dominates adult development. Change in cognitive function (i.e., understanding, comprehension, application/problem solving) occurs in stages in adulthood and reflects a move toward advanced problem-solving ability and greater range of responses (based on cognitive function) to professional and personal challenges.

The work of Harvey, Hunt, and Schroeder (1961) proposes a cognitive stage model which describes a progression of change in beliefs, attitudes, and values. Harvey et al. describe four progressive stages where individuals are viewed as moving through: (1) being self-oriented with emphasis on conforming to external standards; (2) examine competencies apart from external standards; (3) entering a phase of introspection; and (4) establishing an independent set of internal standards. Passage through these

levels of cognitive development constitutes movement or growth toward greater ability both cognitively and behaviorally to manage personal and professional challenges and responsibilities. It should be noted, however, that not all individuals pass through these stages to completion, and individuals progress and may remain at various stages for indefinite periods. Movement from one level to the next is determined by a number of interactive factors. The cognitive parameters, however, dictate an individual's capabilities for managing change and structuring decision making. The framework hypothesized by Harvey et al. serves as an excellent reference point for considering growth in providers' personal development (also see Knox, 1977).

Development of Professional Competence

There exists a multitude of theories and models describing stages or phases which depict change in professional (career) or work development. The majority of these related to child care practitioners focus on stages in teaching competence and consider the relationship between conceptual level and teacher performance. Early work by Hunt and Joyce (1967) found positive correlations between measures of "reflective" teaching and greater conceptual level. Reflective teaching is defined as interactive and individualized with respect to the teachers perspective on scope and content. Competent teaching has been described by several other researchers and has continually been associated with greater teacher conceptual ability (Joyce, Weel, & Wald, 1973; Tomlinson &

Hunt, 1971). Burden (1986) reports other variables associated with greater teacher competence include higher stress tolerance, ability to use multiple teaching styles, greater flexibility in evaluation of performance, and greater ability for problem-solving.

Professional development for teachers involves at least one factor not present in the development of individuals working in the private or corporate sector: prescribed steps for career development. The hierarchial system of public school teaching provides for easier documentation of professional development with respect to features such as length of service, merit raises, promotion, retention, continuing education, certification and endorsement renewal, and various formal types of recognition for service. These career features may differentiate those in public school service but do not completely invalidate model variables which consider other aspects of professional development among practitioners outside the public school system working with young children. Bearing in mind the open or unstructured nature of professional achievement in child care/development, only those models which consider aspects of growth (e.g., job skills, knowledge, teaching performance, confidence, commitment, maturity, professionalism, etc.) other than formal career advancement can be considered.

Studies on professional development of teachers have focused primarily on two phases of growth: preteaching (student teaching)

and inservice (practicing teachers). For example, one model well-known among early childhood professionals is that of Caruso (1977) which emphasizes the development among student teachers. Caruso proposes an overlapping seven step adjustment model depicting change in professional and personal identity prior to acquisition of the formal teaching role.

Similarly, Katz (1972) proposed four developmental stages among preschool teachers: 1) survival, 2) consolidation, 3) renewal, and 4) maturity. A unique perspective held in this model is the idea that teachers may vary in the length of time spent in each stage and in particular characteristics (e.g., behavior, skill, perspective, conceptual level) and therefore require different training assistance for each phase. Such variability in rates of progression through prescribed stages was also noted by Unruh and Turner (1970).

Burden (1980a; 1980b) reported that elementary level teachers pass through three stages: 1) survival (conforming to expectations and images of "good" teaching); 2) adjustment (learning emphasis on all aspects of teaching and increase in confidence and problem solving); and 3) maturity (holistic approach to teaching, willingness to try innovative approaches). His findings are similar (although circumstances and assessment procedures vary) to others (Field, 1979; McDonald, 1982; Newman, 1979; Newman, Burden, and Applegate, 1980; and Peterson, 1979).

All of these perspectives consider developmental change in

which professionals evolve through a process of disequilibrium, adjustment, and balance. This process accounts for the change mechanism in both the professional and personal stages of adult development. Awareness of these developmental stages and trends will provide trainers useful information on the characteristics and motivations of practitioners. Practitioners who are in a transition between stages or phases, for example, may find intensive training highly stressful. Adults in other more stable periods may welcome the challenge of training and seek avenues for professional growth.

Characteristics of Adult Learning

While it is important to acknowledge the developmental trends in professional and personal growth, characteristics of adult learning processes must also be considered when formulating programs for supporting continued growth. Principles of adult learning provide guidelines for creating a variety of learning packages. Many training and educational options for practitioners are based on assumptions of homogenous group motivation, developmental age, similarity, and universal intellectual ability. The variability of these factors which grow more complex with experience may make the use of a single teaching/professional growth approach unsuitable and unsuccessful.

There are a number of approaches and principles concerned with learning during adult years. A synthesis of some of these perspectives from Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) and Knowles

(1978) includes the following:

1. Adults need assistance and support in learning rather than expectations for conforming and meeting demands.

2. Adult learning is reality- and experienced-oriented and approaches should include analysis, not evaluation of experience.

3. Adult differences in learning style, approach, and pace increase with age and necessitate a variety of provisions for teaching.

4. Adult learning is primarily life-situation oriented and specific in scope, thus organization and selection of material should be focused on clearly identified topics or experiences rather than subjects or chronological views.

5. Adult learners are also best served when they are allowed to have input into the topic selection and discussion of contents.

6. The quality of adult learning is also susceptible to interference by a number of external variables (e.g., stress, anxiety, fatigue, change in physical ability) which may vary greatly among individuals within a generally homogenous group.

7. Adult motivation is best reinforced when results of learning are immediate and are relatively successful.

The aspects of adult learning noted above provide guidelines for developing learning experiences appropriate and beneficial for adult practitioners. Keeping in mind the normative stages of adult development, phases of professional competence, and characteristics of adult learning, specific directives for

implementing training programs for child care practitioners can be formulated.

Guidelines for Developing Training Options

a. Assessing conceptual levels

Several literature reviews consider various methods for assessing conceptual level as preparation for staff training. These range from open-ended interviews to formal, standardized tests (Sprinthall and Thies-Sprinthall, 1980). Considering the variety of abilities found in most child care programs, perhaps the most suitable method is to ask a series of open-ended questions. Questions should be designed to elicit information in three areas: what are providers interested in learning more about (e.g. what do they perceive as their "need to know"); in what areas of skill acquisition (e.g. curriculum, classroom management, guidance, etc.) do they feel unsure, unprepared, or inadequate in their immediate daily work; and, finally, in what areas do they feel they need additional skill development and learning for future professional accomplishments. (Note: these areas of future interest may be vastly different for some practitioners who have an idea of long-range goals, but may be similar to previous answers for respondents who have not established long-range professional goals.) Questions designed to assess conceptual level should consider both the exact content for each question and existing differences in content between each type of question and the level of abstraction displayed in the respondents' answers.

The next phase in this process is the blending of content, purpose, and scope of learning into training opportunities that emphasize both process and product.

b. Developing training and professional development options

The work of Sprinthall and Thies-Sprinthall (1980; 1983) offers a comprehensive approach for developing training options and professional growth opportunities. These authors propose basic types of experiences based on the interplay between theory (stage and phases of change) and practice. These experiences include: professional role or perspective taking, site visitations, teaching exchanges, and sharing of ideas among same level personnel; qualitative information-matching (based on the sophistication/complexity of the information (regardless of subject-matter) to the developmental level of the learner; guided reflection or evaluation (teaching learners what to ask and how to question for the purpose of self-controlled review of work performance); guided integration (providing assistance for helping learners balance experience and perspectives necessary for a critique of information from outside sources); arranging for sequential and continuous training programs over time; interpersonal support (providing for support and continued interest during the training process); and, assessment (identifying learner's individual needs and learning mode(s)).

Practitioners at different stages in their professional development have varying skills, interests, and abilities and may

learn differently in training opportunities. Coordinating or matching opportunities to developmental needs and learning styles should be strong consideration for program planners. This matching procedure has been proposed by a number of researchers working with inservice teachers (Wilsey & Killion, 1982).

A model applicable to child care professionals has been proposed by Hunt (1971) and Hunt and Sullivan (1974) to enhance adult learning and professional growth. For example, less developmentally sophisticated individuals, functioning at more intellectually concrete levels, gain the most in training situations from highly structured and specifically defined training experiences. More advanced and intellectually sophisticated individuals gained greater skills in training situations relatively low in structure and high in involvement and participation. In a similar model Watts (1980) proposed general guidelines for matching scope of training options, which suggest structured and "how-to" workshops as most appropriate for professionals in stages of survival and adjustment (see Katz, 1972 and Burden, 1980a), and open-ended, issues-based presentations most suitable for professionals at the mastery stage.

A Synthesis: Developing Training Considerations

Information proposed by several authors considered throughout this paper is contained in Table 1. The model considers a match between three developmental or skill levels of child care practitioners and appropriate training guidelines. Determining

the developmental level (especially with regard to long range goals) is the critical variable for determining practitioner's developmental level.

Insert Table 1 about here

Conclusions

The development of training opportunities for individuals working with young children is a complex process. The issues surrounding this aspect of professional growth are many but center primarily on a "piggy-back" issue: how can opportunities be provided which support and enhance the interpersonal growth of adults whose primary professional responsibility is to promote the interpersonal development of a less mature group of human beings. Allowances or rather perspectives must be presented in a manner which consider the cognitive and affective needs of child care providers as adult learners and their needs and skills in translating their information and expertise in their teaching and guidance with children. The matching of these needs is the goal of designing and implementing training experiences that consider conceptual level and learning characteristics (styles) as the entry keys for supporting skill acquisition in child care practitioners. Promoting qualitative change in adult professionals requires a commitment of supporting steady and sometimes small changes, not unlike the investment and commitment

made to enhance the development of young children.

Table 1. Developmental level and training considerations

Level 1

Entry or maintaining level practitioners: Individuals with beginning level skills or those with limited options or motivation for extensive professional and skill development.

Training consideration: Training experiences highly structured with emphasis on what to do, how to do it, conditions for best use and easy evaluation for success. Topics should be clearly defined, reflect practitioners specified needs, and consider practical immediate application without heavy use of problem solving and analysis. Support materials should be easily read, well-organized, and discussed with participants. Discussions should consider practical examples with visual aids and periodic summation of materials. If possible follow-up sessions would be most beneficial. Try to avoid having participants make spontaneous public speeches as their insecurity may be most stressful.

Level 2

Mid or support level practitioners: Individuals with good quality skills and interest in gaining further skill with goals for some future growth formulated.

Training consideration: Training experiences should include greater content with application still strongly emphasized; analysis of different techniques, ideas, programs can occur when options comparisons are clearly defined. Expect more discussion with trainer and provide guidelines for discussion among participants with reports to the group. Participants will be more able to interact with one another and complete review of support materials need not be as directive. Topics considered may be more broadly defined, however specific statements about goals and content should be stated initially with a clear summary given at the end. Follow-up may be more collaborative/interactive, with participants being guided to suggest alternative actions.

Table 1 (continued). Developmental level and training considerations

Level 3
Mature or facilitating level practitioners: Individuals with high quality skills, abilities and interest in working with adults and children, clear goals and motivation for future professional advancement.
Training consideration: Training options for these practitioners should place heavy emphasis on understanding and clarifying theory and ideas. Participants will have specific needs and ideas they wish to have addressed and will place greater interest in the professional delivery and presentation of subject matter. Options should consider the delivery of information to the group as a whole without emphasis on working interactively through problem-solving or skill-acquisition exercises. These practitioners benefit greatly from clear, organized presentation of new information. Opportunities for discussion and creative solutions for more abstract situations should be presented. Support materials should be available with references for further use. The opinion of experts will be taken seriously and critically. Any follow up should be nondirective and provide clarification for participants on what they understand and are utilizing.

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